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Queen Esther

A
PURIM PLAY

DONALD BAIN



1917
NEW YORK
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QUEEN ESTHER

A PURIM PLAY

BY

DONALD BAIN

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"Leaves by the Wayside," "Poems," etc.

"To establish this among them, that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same yearly, as the days wherein the Jews rested from their enemies, and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning into a good day; that they should make them days of feasting and joy, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor. * * * Wherefore they called these days Purim."—Hebrew Scriptures;—Esther IX, 21, 22, 26.

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no. 1.

QUEEN ESTHER

CHARACTERS.

AHASUERUS, King of the Medes and Persians.

HAMAN, Son of Hammedatha the Agagite: Grand Vizier. (The enemy of Mordecai and the Jews.)

MEHUMAN, Head Chamberlain.

BIZTHA, Chamberlain.

HARBONA “

BIGTHAN, “

ABAGTHA, “

ZETHAR, “

CARCAS, “

TERESH, “

CARSHENA, Prince of Persia.

SHETHAR, “ “

ADMATHA, “ “

TARSHISH, Prince of Media.

MERES, “ “

MARSENA, “ “

MEMUCAN, “ “

MANASSEH, Officer of the King's Guard.

MORDECAI, the Benjamite.

ESTHER (Hadassah), an Orphan: Cousin and adopted daughter of Mordecai: The Queen.

MIRIAM, Daughter of Mordecai.

JOSHUA, Servant of Mordecai.

MELCHOIR, Chief Astrologer and Soothsayer.

BELZAC, Astrologer and Soothsayer.

ZAROSTER, “ “

RUSTAN, Chief Officer of Haman.

RICA, Officer.

PHARIN, “

NADIR, “

IBBI, Chief Scribe.

HATACH, Chief of the Eunuchs.

NARGUM, Chief Chronicler.

ZERESH, Wife of Haman.

USBEK, Chief Butler.

PARSHANDATHA, Son of Haman.

ZELIDA, ZACHI, ZEPHIS, FATME, ZELIS, ROXANA, RENE: Maids of the Queen.

Nobles, Officers, Soldiers, Slaves, Eunuchs and Populace.

QUEEN ESTHER

ACT I.

(Time: 521 B. C.)

Scene 1.—Court of the Garden of the King's Palace.

(Banquet: Deposition of Queen Vashti.)

Scene 2.—Room in Mordecai's House.

(Esther to go to the King's House of Women.)

(Time: 517 B. C.)

Scene 3.—King's Gate: Night.

(Plot of Bigthan and Teresh to Assassinate the King)

ACT II.

(Time: 516 B. C.—First Month.)

Scene 1.—King's Council Chamber.

(The Pur: Decree for the Destruction of the Jews.)

Scene 2.—House of Women: A Room of the Queen.

(Correspondence between Esther and Mordecai.)

Scene 3.—Audience Room in Haman's Palace.

(Haman decides to hang Mordecai.)

ACT III.

(Time: 516 B. C.—Third Month.)

Scene 1.—King's Bed Chamber.

(What the stars foretell: "Whom the King delighteth to honor.")

Scene 2.—House of Women: Queen's Room of State.

(Denunciation and death of Haman.)

Scene 3.—Corridor of the King's Council Chamber.

(Decree for the Jews to resist their enemies.)

ACT IV.

(Time: 516 B. C.—Twelfth Month.)

Scene 1.—Court of the Garden of the King's Palace.

(Attempted slaughter of the Jews: Persians defeated. Feast of Purim established.)

Leit-motif: The strains of the Song of Miriam, commencing
"Sound the loud timbrel o'er Egypt's dark sea; Jehovah hath
triumphed, His people are free!"

ACT I.

SCENE 1.—*Great Feast in the Court of the Garden of the King's Palace.*

White, green and blue hangings, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble.

The beds (couches) of gold and silver draperies, upon a pavement of red and blue and white and black marble.

Drinking vessels of gold, diverse one from another.

Gigantic golden statue of Nebuchadnezzar. An open space before the statue.

Great dishes heaped high with fruit and flowers.

Serving men bearing and placing spices, flowers and fruits.

Whispering together.

Blare of trumpets announcing the approach of the KING.

Servants draw off to rear and sides.

First appear the Priests of Bel, two and two.

In their midst, the Chief Priest with hands crossed on his breast; other Priests bearing the sacred fire and emblems of worship.

Next, the musicians; harps, pipes and trumpets.

Next, the singers; boys and men, two by two, chanting the hymn to Bel.

Great Bel! Ahura-Mazda! God of Day!
At whose approach the darkness flies away.
Great Bel, for Thee we tend the sacred flame
Upon the altar graven with Thy name.

Burn sacred fire to Bel, in love and awe;
Shine as the emblem of his triune law,
Transcending far all mortal cults and creeds—
His precepts three—good thoughts, good words, good deeds.

Great Bel, of all that lives and moves the sire;
From whom proceeds the ever-sacred fire;
In praise to Thee we raise our voices high;
Whose bed the ocean, and whose course the sky.

Fountain of light, of heat and power art Thou;
Flames form Thy footstool; glory girds Thy brow;
All gods and mortals bow before Thy throne,
And render homage due to Thee alone.

From day to day, all in Thy radiance drest,
East to the zenith, zenith to the west;
From morn to night Thou passeth on Thy way,
All heaven encompassed in a single day;

Till the horizon, flaming with Thy rays,
Bears the sure promise of the coming days,
Days without end in which to bow the knee
In adoration of Thy Majesty.

They divide their ranks and stand on the sides.

Next, Haman, the Grand Vizier, and princes and lords.

Next, the King, Ahasuerus, crowned with a tiara of white linen, gold and jewels; the golden sceptre in his right hand.

Manasseh, Lieutenant of King's Guards, and soldiers with shields and spears.

The music ceases. All prostrate themselves before the King.

The King seats himself in the centre of the main table, facing the audience; next Haman on the King's right hand, and guests, take their places.

Black slaves, behind the King and princes, ply palm leaf fans.

The Chief Butler (Usbek) fills the King's massive chalice. Attendants fill for the guests.

The King stands, all stand.

The King takes the chalice in his two hands. The trumpets sound.

HAMAN: Harkening and attention; the King speaketh.

[*The KING lifts the cup and, first spilling some of the contents on the floor.*]

AHASUERUS: I drink to Bel, the great god of all gods, before whom all gods and men tremble.

[*He drinks. Singers chant verses of Hymn to BEL.*]

“Great Bel, of all that lives and moves the sire;
From whom proceeds the ever-sacred fire;
In praise to Thee we raise our voices high;
Whose bed the ocean, and whose course the sky.

Fountain of light, of heat and power art Thou;
Flames form Thy footstool; glory girds Thy brow;
All gods and mortals bow before Thy throne,
And render homage due to Thee alone.”

ALL: Hail, King of Kings, live forever. Hail most mighty King.

[All are seated and the banquet proceeds.]

[The serving men strew flowers and sprinkle sweet odors, and serve the guests. Music and dancing.]

[The KING speaks to HAMAN.]

HAMAN *[Standing]*: The King commands, and all who hear take heed, for so the King hath appointed. Let all men drink according to his pleasure; let none compel; this is the law which altereth not. Thus saith the King, the King of Kings, of Media and of Persia, from India even unto Ethiopia; the King who lives forever.

[Applause and blare of trumpets.]

[Wine is served around, and drinking and talking go on.]

The KING drinks, talks and laughs and becomes merry.

Girls come in and dance before him.]

[The KING speaks to HAMAN.]

HAMAN: Harkening and attention; the King speaketh.

AHASUERUS *[Still reclining]*: Enough! The climax of this our seven days feast approaches. To show our royal pleasure to our Queen and to you, our loyal lieges and devoted subjects, we command; come forward our Chamberlains.

[The seven Chamberlains come forward and bow before the KING.]

AHASUERUS: Mehuman and Chamberlains, go ye to the Queen, the beauteous Vashti, who but now is holding a feast for the women within the Royal House within the Palace, and bid her of her graciousness, hither to crown our feast with her presence. Let the Queen appear in robes of state and wearing the crown royal, that she may stand before our presence and in the presence of our princes and our people; that all may see her wondrous beauty. That were a fitting climax to this our royal celebration.

[Applause. "May the King live forever!"]

MEHUMAN *[Bowing together with the Chamberlains]*: We hear and obey.

[*Erit Chamberlains, backward and salaaming.*]

[*The feast goes on. King continues to drink, laugh and talk.*]

[*The KING speaks to HAMAN.*]

HAMAN: The King commands. Let the revels continue until the approach of the Queen is announced.

[*Applause. Music and dancing.*]

[*Enter Chamberlains, who bow and stand before the King.*]

HAMAN: The King commands silence and attention.

AHASUERUS [*To Chamberlains*]: The Queen approaches.

MEHUMAN: O King, live forever. May thy servant speak and live?

AHASUERUS: Speak.

MEHUMAN: O King, the Queen cometh not.

AHASUERUS: What meaneth this sacrilege? Ye return into our presence without the Queen? How dare ye enter and stand before us, our commands unfulfilled?

MEHUMAN: O Great King of Kings, Ruler of the World; live forever! Thy servants, as thou commandest, bore thy most gracious message to the Queen, who had just risen from the feast of women, and for a cause of which we wot not, and of which she would not speak, refuses to appear at the King's bidding.

[*He remains bowed.*]

AHASUERUS [*Showing signs of great and growing anger, and flushed with wine*]: Do I hear aright? Beware, O Mehuman, and thy fellows, how thou triflest with our majesty. The Queen refuses to do our bidding, and will not come?

MEHUMAN: It is as thou sayest, most glorious majesty.

AHASUERUS: By Ishtar! This is beyond endurance. The Queen thus to defy us who sought to do her honor, and to grace this our great celebration. We will not brook the affront, thus to be flouted before our princes and our people. Princes of Media and Persia, to you we turn.

[*Chamberlains back out to rear and stand bowed.*]

Princes of Persia and of Media. Ye have heard our gracious message to the Queen, and how she hath refused to do our bidding to grace this day our celebration and appear before us wearing the crown royal to her own honor and to the honor of the Court, our princes and our people. What say ye? What shall we do unto the Queen Vashti according to law, because she hath not performed the commandment of the King by the Chamberlains? Speak thou, most worthy Memucan.

PRINCE MEMUCAN: O King, live forever! Most noble Ahasuerus and princes of Media and Persia, whom the King delighteth to honor, Vashti, the Queen, hath not done wrong to the King only, but also to all the princes, and to all the people that are in all the provinces of the King Ahasuerus. For this deed of the Queen shall come abroad to all women, so that they shall despise their husbands in their eyes, when it shall be reported, the King Ahasuerus commanded Vashti the Queen to be brought in before him, but she came not. Likewise shall the ladies of Persia and Media say this day unto all the King's princes which have heard of the deed of the Queen. Thus shall there arise too much contempt and wrath. If it please the King, let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered, that Vashti come no more before King Ahasuerus; and let the King give her royal estate to another that is better than she. And when the King's decree which he shall make shall be published throughout all his empire (for it is great), all the wives shall give to their husbands honor, both to great and small.

OTHER PRINCES: O King, live forever! So say we all, O King.

THE PEOPLE: O King, live forever! So say we all, O King.

AHASUERUS: This is our royal command, and let all take heed. It is the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not, nor shall it be abated one jot or one tittle until the earth is destroyed by fire and the heavens shall be rolled up as a scroll and pass away forever. [*To HAMAN*]: Haman, our chief and loyal subject, let the scribes prepare letters and see that they be immediately sent by speedy and trusty couriers into all the King's provinces, into every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their own language, that every man shall bear rule in his own house, and let it be published

according to the language of every people throughout the length and breadth of my dominions, from India even unto Ethiopia. The King hath said it and so shall it be done.

HAMAN: I hear and obey.

SCENE 2.—*Room in Mordecai's House.*

Hadassah and Miriam seated at embroidery.

MIRIAM: Dear sister, I do wish father Mordecai would come. He is later than is his wont.

HADASSAH: Yea; he hath been gone since an early hour; but he hath matters of moment as thou knowest; and when he left home he bade us not be impatient for his homecoming.

MIRIAM: True, sister mine; but in these troublous times I am anxious when he is away from home.

HADASSAH: When saw ye Manasseh last?

MIRIAM: 'Tis a week since. His appointment as lieutenant in the King's Guard leaves him little time for his friends, alas.

HADASSAH: Didst know he was expected here today? He met father Mordecai for a moment at the King's Gate yesterday, and said that we might look for him before sunset today.

MIRIAM: Why didst not tell me this before?

HADASSAH: Other matters of greater weight have occupied me.

MIRIAM: Of greater weight, indeed, to drive thoughts of our dear cousin from thy mind.

HADASSAH: Cousin, dear cousin; foolish girl. Nay, blush not. He is worthy of thy affection, which thou canst not hide from thy sister, Miriam.

MIRIAM: I would not hide it from thee, Hadassah, even if I could. I do hope he will succeed. It is no light matter for a Jew to have obtained admittance to the King's Guard.

HADASSAH: Indeed, no; and yet I feel sure he will acquit himself as a true son of Israel, and gain the approval of the King in spite of his youth.

MIRIAM: His youth, say ye? He was twenty last Adar.

HADASSAH: And, therefore, I suppose, thou thinkest him a man grown; a man of discretion and valor, ha, ha.

MIRIAM: 'Tis not seemly to jest. I am no child. I am turned eighteen, and, as father says, old for my years.

HADASSAH: Old, sayest thou? Oh ye two; so venerable and sedate; eighteen and twenty; and their years weigh heavily upon them. Oh, ye children.

[*Knocking without.*]

HADASSAH: Enter.

[*Enter MANASSEH.*]

MANASSEH: Greeting, fair cousins. Art well; and father Mordecai, hath he not come home?

HADASSAH and MIRIAM: Greeting, Manasseh.

HADASSAH: Thou comest on the wings of our thoughts. Greeting, most noble man of war.

MIRIAM: Father will soon be here, we hope.

HADASSAH: Yea; he hath been engaged on important duties which hath delayed him. I, too, have duties against his coming, and will leave ye. But, Manasseh, thou who art so old and grave, I trust wilt engage Miriam in discourse suited to thy age and dignity. Eighteen and twenty, ha, ha.

[*Exit HADASSAH.*]

MANASSEH: Miriam, what meaneth Hadassah with her "Man of war, old and venerable, serious discourse; eighteen and twenty, ha, ha"? Such levity in Hadassah calleth for an explanation.

MIRIAM: We were talking, even as thou camest, of thy duties as lieutenant of the King's Guard, and Hadassah said, "But his youth!" said she. "Twenty last Adar," said I; and that is not so young, is it?

MANASSEH: Young, nay; 'tis a ripe age.

MIRIAM: Then she twitted me with my age; eighteen; as though I were a mere child and twenty a great age in my sight.

MANASSEH: Well, Hadassah is but four and twenty; and I suppose she imagineth in her heart that we are but infants.

MIRIAM: Yea; but, dear Hadassah; she loveth me like a cousin, like a sister, like a mother, and I love her likewise, oh, so dearly.

MANASSEH: I, too, love Hadassah, and love her the more for her love of thee and thy love of her, Miriam. I brought these flowers for thee.

MIRIAM: Thanks, Manasseh. How sweet they are.

MANASSEH: Not half so sweet as thou art, Miriam. See, red and white roses; these glorious Persian roses, and blue forget-me-nots.

MIRIAM: I love flowers.

MANASSEH: I, too, love flowers, and love them doubly for thy love of them. Would'st know their meaning, Miriam?

MIRIAM: Aye, Manasseh.

MANASSEH: "White for thy spotless soul; Blue for thine eyes."

MIRIAM: Yea, yea; and——

MANASSEH: "Red for my love of thee; Which never dies."

MIRIAM [*Blushing and shrinking*]: Oh, Manasseh.

MANASSEH: Dost love me too, a little, Miriam?

MIRIAM: Oh, Manasseh, meseems love is in the air tonight. I love Hadassah; thou lovest her because she hath my love; flowers I love; thou lovest them for a like reason; as thou lovest Hadassah and flowers and me; so I love Hadassah and flowers and thee.

[*They embrace.*]

[*Enter HADASSAH.*]

[*They separate and look conscious.*]

HADASSAH: Well, Manasseh, hath entertained Miriam with seemly discourse?

MIRIAM: He surely hath, my sister.

HADASSAH: And may I ask the subject of thy discourse, which mine eyes bear witness could not have been of that calmness and deliberation befitting mature minds?

MANASSEH: 'Twas somewhat of grammar, dear cousin.

HADASSAH: An edifying subject, forsooth.

MANASSEH: Aye, the conjugation of the verb "to love." Thus—I love; she loves; we love. And there you are.

HADASSAH: And there am I. A fit subject for eighteen and twenty; eighteen and twenty. I love; she loves; we love; and there you are!

MANASSEH *and* MIRIAM [*Taking hands*]: I love——

MANASSEH	} [<i>Together</i>]:	{	She loves.
MIRIAM			He loves.

MIRIAM *and* MANASSEH: We love; and we love thee; and there you are.

HADASSAH: Thou precious children; and I, too, love thee with all my heart. Here comes father.

[*Enter MORDECAI.*]

MORDECAI: Greeting, my children, Hadassah, Miriam, Manasseh.

ALL: Greeting to thee, father Mordecai.

[HADASSAH *relieves him of cloak and hat. He is weary.*]

MORDECAI: I tarried late; but it was unavoidable. I supped with Isaac ben Adon.

MIRIAM: Dear father; thou art tired. Hath thy day been long and wearing?

MORDECAI: Aye, daughter, I have had a hard day.

HADASSAH: Come, father, and rest thee.

[HADASSAH *seats him, while MIRIAM removes his boots and puts on slippers.*]

MORDECAI: Truly, rest is grateful to my weary limbs. Call Joshua.

[HADASSAH *rings a bell.*]

MORDECAI: Manasseh, my son; is all well with thee?

MANASSEH: Father Mordecai, all is not well with me.

MORDECAI: What is it troubleth thee, my son?

MANASSEH: My duties are pleasant, and, for a soldier, all that I could wish, except——

MORDECAI: Except?

MANASSEH: My conscience troubleth me. A Jew am I—a worshipper of Jehovah; yet have I bowed before Bel and the

gods of the Persians and bent the knee at the name of Ahura Mazda.

MORDECAI: Let not thy heart trouble thee. I know thou art true to the God of our fathers. Thy duty is to the King, and a formal compliance with the Persian ritual in the temple of their gods while in attendance on the King will not be imputed as a sin to thee.

MANASSEH: Remain and bow before Bel, the god of the Persians! Will Jehovah pardon me for this?

MORDECAI: My son, remember ye not the case of Naaman the Syrian, who was cured of his leprosy by the prophet Elisha, and how the Syrian general said to the prophet of the Lord, "In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the House of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the House of Rimmon; when I bow down myself in the House of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing." And Elisha said unto him, "Go in peace." I, too, say to thee, Manasseh, go in peace.

MANASSEH: Thanks, father Mordecai; thou hast lifted a burden from my heart. Grant me thy blessing ere I go to the King.

MORDECAI: My blessing go with thee, Manasseh. May the God of our fathers be with thee in all thy ways; in thy downsittings and thy uprisings; thy outgoings and thy incomings; and when thou standest before the King and bowest at the name of Bel, our God who searchest the hearts of all men will know that thou art a true son of Israel and His servant even in the presence of the gods of the Persians. Go in peace.

MANASSEH: Farewell, O Mordecai; farewell Hadassah, and thou, Miriam, farewell.

ALL: Fare thee well, Manasseh.

[Exit MANASSEH.]

[Enter JOSHUA.]

MORDECAI: Joshua, bring lights and the Book of Psalms of King David.

[Exit JOSHUA.]

[In the meantime HADASSAH and MIRIAM have resumed their embroidery.]

MORDECAI: Daughters, lay aside thy embroidery, and draw near. The day is spent and night cometh, when labor, even of the lightest and pleasantest, may well be laid aside. Come hither, daughters, and, as is thy wont, sit beside me, and let us talk awhile; for I have matter of great moment both to thee and to me and to our people to disclose to thee.

[*They draw near and seat themselves at the feet of MORDECAI. JOSHUA enters with lamp and the Book of Psalms. He places the book before MORDECAI and arranges the light and curtains.*]

MORDECAI: It is well, Joshua; thou mayest go.

[JOSHUA bows.]

MORDECAI: Yet stay, Joshua; thou art a true and faithful servant; even more than a servant, a friend. Stay and hear what I have to say to-night.

JOSHUA: Master, I stay.

MORDECAI: First, I will read from the Psalms of the Great King of Israel; the sweet singer both of joy and adversity.

[*He reads with great emphasis.*]

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down,
Yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.
We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.
For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song;
And they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying,
Sing us one of the songs of Zion.
How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?
If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,
Let my right hand forget her cunning.
If I do not remember thee,
Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth;
If I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.
Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom
In the day of Jerusalem; who said,
Rase it, rase it, even to the foundations thereof.
O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed;
Happy shall he be that rewardeth thee
As thou hast served us.
Happy shall he be that taketh
And dasheth thy little ones against the stones.

[*He lays aside the book and strokes the hair of HADASSAH.*]

MORDECAI: Dear daughter. Cousin were too cold a term, yet cousin thou art, and glad am I of the bond of blood and kindred which holdeth us. Since thou camest to me, a little child, upon thy father, my beloved uncle's death, thou hast ever been to me as a dutiful and well beloved daughter; as dutiful, as fair and comely.

MIRIAM: And a dear sister to me.

MORDECAI: Now thou hast arrived at woman's estate, and the first word of anger or displeasure on thy account hath yet to be spoken by me.

HADASSAH: Dear, dear father; I trust it never will be spoken.

MIRIAM: Indeed no, sister mine.

MORDECAI: Assured am I that it never will be spoken. How fair thou art, in thy innocence and modesty, thou hast never realized. But thy beauty and grace are such that by the mercy of Jehovah, the God of our fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, thou mayest become the very daughter of Israel, raised up to deliver Israel from the hand of the oppressor, and to save the remnant of the people, to fulfill the law and the prophets.

HADASSAH: I, a daughter of Israel? To deliver our people? Surely—surely—I—— It cannot be, I—I——

MORDECAI: Be not too concerned. We will talk of this anon. First, as the night is yet young, there is no reason why we should forego our usual custom. Take now thy harp, the favorite instrument of the great King David, and, accompanying thy voice therewith, sing me one of our old melodies that warm the heart and raise the soul into communion with Jehovah, who, I am assured, still looks over the destinies of His chosen people.

HADASSAH: Indeed, dear father, to do your will has ever been my delight.

MORDECAI: There, there; now for the song, dear daughter. We will talk afterwards.

[HADASSAH *plays and sings.*]

THE SONG OF MIRIAM.

Strike up the timbrels,
With song and with dance;

The soldiers of Pharaoh
With shield and with lance,
Our fathers pursuing
Across the Red Sea
Are whelmed in the waters,
And Israel goes free.

Free from their bondage
Beneath Pharaoh's rod,
Free by the hand of
Jehovah their God.
Strike up the timbrels,
And lift up your voice,
Jehovah is with us,
Let Israel rejoice.

MORDECAI: One more song, my loved one; and then to our talk. Let it be your favorite, The Daughters of Israel.

[HADASSAH *plays and sings.*]

THE DAUGHTERS OF ISRAEL.

When Israel was with dreadful peril fraught,
By woman's hand deliverance was wrought.
By woman will Jehovah once again
Free Israel from her bonds of stress and pain.

As Deborah, the prophetess of old,
The awful death of Sisera foretold,
E'en by the hand of God's handmaiden, Jael,
Who through his temple drove the deadly nail.

Four days each year, all Israel laments
Jephtha's fair daughter; weeping in their tents;
For nothing would his vow to God suffice,
But she should be his willing sacrifice.

When Holofernes, with his army vast,
Sought to destroy thy people in the past,
Judith arose and smote him as he lay,
Filling the Persian host with dire dismay.

MORDECAI: I have another verse to add. Listen and repeat after me; then, with bowed heads in supplication to Jehovah, we will sing——

Again will great Jehovah, in His wrath
Sweep the imposter from His people's path;

[*All repeat.*]

Jehovah, may Thy daughter, in Thine eyes,
Find favor for so great an enterprise.

[*All repeat.*]

MORDECAI: Jehovah, may Thy daughter, in Thine eyes,
Find favor for so great an enterprise.

[*All repeat.*]

[*They recite the verse together. HADASSAH plays and sings the verse.*]

MORDECAI: The significance of what we have just sung, I will now make apparent. As you all know, King Ahasuerus hath been holding high festival in Shushan the Palace. On the night of the seventh and last day of the festival, a great and sumptuous banquet was held; wine was served according to the custom, and great joy and merriment prevailed. The King, as the crowning glory of the celebration, devised that Queen Vashti should appear wearing the crown royal and stand before the King and the assembly to display her beauty. He then and there publicly sent the seven Chamberlains with his royal commands for her presence. The Chamberlains returned without the Queen; she refused to obey. The wrath of the King was great at the public affront thus given him by the Queen, and, by the advice of Prince Memucan, and the Princes of Media and Persia, he hath decreed that Vashti, the Queen, come no more before the King Ahasuerus, and that her royal estate be given to another that is better than she.

HADASSAH: Poor, poor Queen, how sorry am I for her. Can nothing be done for her? Will not the King be persuaded to forgive her?

MIRIAM: How I pity her.

MORDECAI: Nay, he hath hardened his heart, and the matter hath gone too far. This occurred two moons since. Now the King hath decided to take another Queen in the place of Vashti, and hath appointed officers in all the provinces of his kingdom to gather together all the fair young virgins unto Shushan the Palace, to the House of Women, unto the custody of Hegai, the King's Chamberlain, Keeper of Women; so that, in due form, the King may choose among them the maiden which it may

please the King to make his Queen in the place and stead of the deposed Vashti.

HADASSAH: Oh, father, it cannot be. No, no.

MIRIAM: How glorious to be Queen; but to be rejected!

MORDECAI: My daughter. Daughter of Israel; thou art fair to look upon, and hath a wisdom and discretion beyond thy years. What if Jehovah should move the heart of Ahasuerus to choose thee from among all the maidens for his Queen?

HADASSAH: Choose me? Oh, my father!

MIRIAM: Choose Hadassah, my sister Hadassah for Queen. Oh, Hadassah!

MORDECAI: Stay, my daughters, hear me. These be perilous times for Israel. Even now I am assured that the wicked Haman designeth the destruction of the Jews and intends to procure a decree of the King to that end. Our people are in the hands of Jehovah. He will assuredly raise up a deliverer.

HADASSAH: Thou, my father, wilt deliver Israel. Thou art a leader among the people, who love thee and will do thy bidding.

MIRIAM and JOSHUA: Yea, yea, thou wilt deliver Israel.

MORDECAI: Nay, not so. It may be permitted me to be a humble instrument of the Almighty; but it is to Hadassah I look for the fulfillment of the will of Jehovah to thwart the evil designs of the wicked Haman. Yea, I verily believe that the God of our fathers is with us yet, and, by His goodness and mercy, and love for His suffering people, is about to raise up another daughter of Israel to be His handmaiden, as the chosen Queen of Ahasuerus, to bring great good and deliverance to Israel. What sayest thou, my daughter?

HADASSAH: Oh, father, I cannot think that such a thing is possible; that I, a young, homekeeping maid, that goeth in and out before thy face in peace and obscurity, knowing nothing of pomps and courts, should meet with favor in the sight of a king, who, in his own eyes, and in the eyes of his subjects, is little short of a god. The very thought overwhelms me. Who am I that such a thing should come to pass in me?

MORDECAI: Thou art my beloved daughter, Hadassah. Thy name, meaning the myrtle, shall be changed and, henceforth thou shalt be called Esther, meaning a star. This will please the

Persians, who worship the stars; and the Jews will come to look upon thee as their bright, particular star of deliverance. Dost thou remember my dream, which I have often related to thee?

ESTHER: Aye, dear father. What of thy dream?

JOSHUA: Aye, his dream.

MORDECAI: But last night I again dreamed the dream. Once again I dreamed, and behold, from beneath the branches of a myrtle tree there trickled a little stream of water, pure as crystal, which flowed on and came to a place where were two warriors fighting; and, as they fought, the streamlet flowed between them, and it grew and spread and separated them afar; and I saw the combatants no more. And behold the stream increased until it became a mighty flood, covering all the earth.

ESTHER: Knowest thou, dear father, the meaning of this thy dream?

MORDECAI: Oft have I wondered what this dream might mean, and hitherto have been unable to solve the mystery. Now have I come to know its meaning and the purport thereof.

ESTHER: Tell me, dear father, what is the meaning of thy dream, and what is the interpretation thereof.

MIRIAM: Tell us, tell us.

MORDECAI: The interpretation of my dream is this, O Esther. The fighting men are Haman, the Grand Vizier, and thy father, whom he seeketh to destroy. The rill of pure water issuing from underneath the myrtle is thyself, who shall separate the fighters, and, increasing in power and dignity, shall spread thy influence over all the land, to protect thy kindred and thy race from the evil designs of this wicked Haman. This is the true interpretation of my dream.

ESTHER: Dear father, I am in thy hands. What thou sayest I will do; but O, I pray thee, guide me with thy counsel which I so sorely need, for I am weak.

MORDECAI: Whatever can be done by me, I will surely do under the guidance of the great Jehovah, who will keep us under the shadow of His all protecting wings.

ESTHER: Thy will is my law, my father; I am thine to do with as thou wilt. Thy wisdom shall be my guide. But, oh, how can I accomplish so great an undertaking?

MORDECAI: All things are possible with Jehovah, who sometimes chooses the humblest to be the instruments of His will. I feel it to be the will of Jehovah that I make the sacrifice of my dearest wishes and that thou shouldst lend thyself as the servant of the Almighty, the God of our fathers. We are a subject race, for our sins; in thrall and subjection to an arrogant King, albeit he is gentle and kind in his personal relations (take comfort from this, my daughter). We are subject to the hatred and machinations of the wicked Haman, who hath great influence over the King. Think, O my daughter, what power for good to our race might be exercised by a Queen, casting the spell of her love and beauty over the vain and impressionable King. I have wrestled in prayer at the feet of Jehovah, even as our father Jacob wrestled with the angel of the Lord, and it hath come upon me with a force I am compelled to heed, even as the direct command of Jehovah, that thou shouldst go up with the maidens to Hegai, the Keeper of Women in the King's House.

ESTHER: O, my father, I bow to thy will and to the will of Jehovah. I should not otherwise be worthy of thee, and of the name of daughter. Do with me as thou wilt.

MORDECAI: So be it. Remember one thing above all others. Show not thy people nor thy kindred. Say no word of thy Jewish origin. Be wary and discreet and leave the issue to the God of Hosts, for the God of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge. I will never cease to intercede for thee; for thy welfare and success. Be assured thou art in the keeping of the Almighty and under the shadow of his wing. Hadassah, Esther, my daughter, Daughter of Israel! Prepare then to accompany me to the palace on the fifteenth day of the month, six days hence. My servants will be instructed as to thy apparel and furnishings and the preparations necessary according to the King's decree and according to the law.

ESTHER: Dear father, I hear and obey.

MORDECAI: And now, good-night. Take courage in thy right hand and in thy left hand comfort. When thou art gone from me, every day will I walk before the court of the Women's House to know how my daughter doeth, and what shall become of her. And now again, good-night, beloved. May the God of our fathers have thee in His keeping now and forever.

MIRIAM: I, too, will pray for thee, dear sister.

ESTHER: I am in thy hands. Do with me as thou wilt. Harkening and obedience to thee, as always, will be my duty and pleasure.

MORDECAI [*Kissing ESTHER on brow and embracing her*]: Good night, my daughter. [*Kissing MIRIAM*]: Comfort and sustain thy sister. Good-night.

BOTH: Good-night, good-night.

[*Exit ESTHER and MIRIAM.*]

MORDECAI [*In act of prayer. JOSHUA kneels*]: God of Israel, hear my prayer. Thou hast put into my heart this thing: that Esther shall be raised up, a Daughter of Israel, to save Thy people.

Even as Thou aforetime brought Thy people out of the land of Egypt and out of the House of Bondage, Thou wilt again deliver Thy people from the hand of the oppressor now laid heavily upon them. His hand is but Thy instrument to chastise a froward people. But they have repented, O God, aye, in sackcloth and ashes have they repented them of their transgressions. Have mercy, O God. Remove Thy wrath from them, I beseech Thee. Strengthen Thy servant to carry out his part in this so great an undertaking, and, above all, bless and sustain Thy daughter Esther, that Thy people through her may be saved. O God of my fathers, of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, I praise Thy name forever and ever. Amen.

SCENE 3.—*King's Gate: Night.*

[*Enter BIGTHAN richly clad and cloaked. He skulks and paces.*]

BIGTHAN: Why comes not Teresh, as was agreed between us to meet at this time and place? Time is pressing, and there is much to do. Why comes he not? Can it be his heart faileth him? Peradventure he hath turned craven, or traitor! Perish the thought. It cannot be. This cursed waiting and suspense! And time goeth on apace. My duties call within the hour; to

be late were madness at this juncture. 'Twould cast suspicion on me. I must not be late, and yet—— He must come, he must.

[He sits, he walks, he mutters, showing signs of great impatience.]

[Enter MORDECAI and JOSHUA, unseen of BIGTHAN, whom they see.]

MORDECAI: As I live, the King's Chamberlain! What doeth he here at night? No good, I'll warrant. I have long marked him as an enemy of the King and contemner of God's chosen people. He hath knowledge, I know not how, of Esther's parentage. Evil is in his heart. Mischief lurks in his scheming mind. We must beware.

JOSHUA: I did but now see the Chamberlain Teresh in converse with a number of the King's officers, attendants on Haman. He left the precincts but a few moments ago.

MORDECAI: Keep watch. No good can come of this.

[They shrink into hiding, keeping BIGTHAN in view.]

[Enter TERESH.]

JOSHUA: As I live, Teresh the Chamberlain.

MORDECAI: Another of the Chamberlains. Some plot afoot. Keep hidden, Joshua, watch and listen.

JOSHUA: Aye, master, I will give heed.

MORDECAI: He speaks, hearken!

TERESH: At last, I'm here! At last! Such news! Such cursed news, my Bigthan.

BIGTHAN: 'Twere cause indeed to keep me waiting here in dire suspense. Methinks naught but matters of extreme moment can excuse thy tardiness to my unrest and torment.

[JOSHUA stirs and is restrained by MORDECAI.]

TERESH: Hist! Heardst thou aught?

BIGTHAN: Nothing, but the beating of my heart and the throbbing of my temples. Such delays do not tend to calm the mind, Teresh.

TERESH: Enough of thy reproaches, which as thou shalt hear, are unmerited.

BIGTHAN: Speak, my time is short. On no account must I be tardy at my post at such a time. Speak, I say, speak.

TERESH: Know, then, first, the King hath chosen a Queen at last.

BIGTHAN: Sayst thou so; a Queen at last! Well, the great King hath been four years in making his choice.

TERESH: Aye, were I Ahasuerus and Ahasuerus, Teresh, methinks the time he hath taken for a choice might be even further extended; in fact, as long as there remained maids to choose from. Truly a royal pastime.

BIGTHAN: This is no time for ribald jesting. Who is the maid that hath found favor with his mightiness?

TERESH: Curb thy impatience, Bigthan. She is called Esther.

MORDECAI [*Aside*]: God of Israel! It is done! Esther is Queen!

JOSHUA: My little Esther is Queen!

MORDECAI: Give heed.

BIGTHAN: What? The Jewess? By Nabon and Bel. That were a worthy choice indeed.

TERESH: Say you she is a Jewess? Impossible! How know you this?

BIGTHAN: She is the adopted daughter of the accursed Jew, Mordecai, who hath incurred the enmity of Haman by refusing to bow down and do homage to his newly bestowed dignity.

TERESH: Prince Haman, as you know, is prepared to request a decree from the King for the destruction of the Jews.

BIGTHAN: Aye, if the King lives to grant the decree.

TERESH: One King or another, what matters, so long as the decree is made and carried out?

BIGTHAN: If our plans miscarry not, Haman may make the decree himself. But this new Queen may cause trouble, unless we act promptly.

TERESH: Of a truth, we did not foresee such an outcome of the King's whim. But I would not swerve from our purpose even for the satisfaction of seeing the streets running with the blood of that accursed race—much as one could wish it to come to pass.

BIGTHAN: Thou sayest sooth. The King shall die the death, let come what may. Vashti shall be avenged.

TERESH: Aye, Vashti shall be avenged, and that I swear.

BIGTHAN: Time presses. Let me know, and that quickly, what hath been done to further our plans?

TERESH: The decision of the King to make Esther Queen is opportune. The marriage will be celebrated in feasting and dancing for seven days. The King will feel secure. At the end of the feast and on the sixth day of the month the King goeth to the temple of Auramazda, returning late to the Palace, and, according to the law and the custom from time immemorial, he will spend the night alone in the east chamber. I shall have the placing of the guards, and well I know trusty followers to place at the inner and outer gates.

BIGTHAN: Aye, no trouble about that.

TERESH: An hour after the King hath retired, the guards being disposed of discreetly, we, with two of our friends, whom we wot of, will go in and dispatch the King; and then away, if thy plans are as well arranged as mine.

BIGTHAN: Rest assured on that score, my Teresh. Speedy horses of Araby, and fleetest dromedaries for the spoils, will be in readiness at the Orient Gate.

TERESH: Aye, the Jews have well instructed us in that. In this Jehovah is our God.

BIGTHAN: Truly a God after mine own heart. We will out-Jew the Jew in this. We will spoil the Egyptians. We will not go empty handed.

BOTH: The spoils! The spoils will be ours.

TERESH: In this Jehovah is our God and Moses is our law-giver.

BIGTHAN: With the treasure already secured, and what else we can conveniently lay our hands on, we shall be many farsangs away ere morning; and we shall be avenged for Vashti. So keep good counsel and abide the event. My time is up. We must away.

TERESH: Our route is along the Babylon Road; thence by the road toward Ninevah until we come to the Ecbatana Way, thence

northward to Ecbatana in Media and so beyond the frontiers. Relays will be prepared and held in readiness. All is arranged. Remember and farewell.

BIGTHAN: Aye, remember and farewell.

BOTH: Farewell. Vashti shall be avenged. By Narbon and Bel, we swear it.

[*Exit BIGTHAN and TERESH.*]

JOSHUA: Master, Hadassah—Esther is Queen!

MORDECAI: Praised be Jehovah! But the plot! Say naught to anyone. Leave it to me. In this I see the hand of the Almighty. The plot shall be brought to naught, and thereby shall good come to Israel. Jehovah guided us hither.

JOSHUA: Aye, master, and Esther is Queen!

MORDECAI: Let us away. Leave it all to me; and not a word of what hath passed until I give thee leave. Now, get thee hence and announce my return home within the hour. I rely on thy silence and discretion.

JOSHUA: May my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, and my right hand forget its cunning if I fail thee in this.

MORDECAI: Now, go.

JOSHUA: Harkening and obedience.

[*Exit JOSHUA.*]

MORDECAI: I will to the Palace and discover the plot and then, the issue is in the hands of the Almighty. Hadassah is Queen! I see the divine will in this. Esther is Queen, and Thy people, O Jehovah, shall be saved.

ACT II

SCENE 1.—*King's Council Chamber.*

Throne vacant; Princes, Councillors, seated and talking.

Enter Prince Haman and Prince Carshena, conversing.

HAMAN: Greeting, Princes and Councillors.

PRINCES and COUNCILLORS: Greeting, most noble Prince Haman and Prince Carshena.

[The Princes and Councillors converse together.]

PRINCE CARSHENA *[To HAMAN]*: I speak that which is in my heart, and in the hearts and minds of thy friends. This Mordecai, this pestilent Jew, who refuses to recognize thy high estate, which the King in his wisdom hath bestowed upon thee, and which thou so well meritest——

HAMAN *[Pleased]*: Thy kindness and thy love I know from times past, I thank thee.

CARSHENA: This Jew, I say, must be seized and dealt with even as his insubordination deserves; both as a punishment to him and as a warning to his race. Let him be seized and cast into prison to teach a salutary lesson to these turbulent dogs.

HAMAN: Peace, worthy Prince; I would think scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone. Trust me to show my resentment in a manner which shall strike terror into the hearts of the Jews; for this I shall have the warrant of the King himself in due course. Mark well what I say.

HAMAN *[Turning to the Councillors]*: Princes and Councillors. Before the King arrives, I would bespeak your attention on the matter which has been heretofore discussed, to-wit: the action which should be taken to effectually suppress the Jews, who are becoming more and more turbulent and are a menace to the peace of the empire and the safety of King Ahasuerus and to ourselves.

PRINCE CARSHENA: Severe measures should be taken and that forthwith.

PRINCE SHETAR: Their death, their extermination should be

required of the King. For thus only shall we have peace and security.

PRINCE CARSHENA: No, no. They should be vigorously suppressed; yet, aside from their leader Mordecai, I should be sorry to spill their blood. As for Mordecai, he merits death, and the safety of the realm requires it.

PRINCE HAMAN: Things are at such a pass, that nothing short of extermination will relieve us from an intolerable condition, which hath lasted too long already.

PRINCE ADMATHA: I agree with Prince Haman.

PRINCE MERES: And I.

PRINCE MARSENA: And I.

MEMUCAN: The Jews must perish. They defy the Persian gods.

HAMAN: The King feareth they will soon be beyond all control unless severe measures are taken, and taken soon. Their destruction is imperative for the peace and welfare of the Kingdom.

ADMATHA: Death to the Jews, I say.

CARSHENA: No, no; not death. Anything short of that, I am for.

MERES: Death.

MARSENA: I am for death.

OTHERS: Agreed. Let it be death for the Jews.

HAMAN: So be it.

CARSHENA: Such being your will, I agree.

HAMAN: Leave it to me. The decree is certain. I know the temper of the King. Now, as to the time.

MERES: Let it be soon; within the month.

ADMATHA: For a widespread extermination, that were too short a time.

HAMAN: Yea, the time is too short.

CARSHENA: Let it be a year hence.

MERES: Why delay so long?

MARSENA: The pur; the pur. Let us cast lots.

ALL: The pur! The pur!

HAMAN: Aye, we will cast lots. Let each inscribe a day certain, and I will draw the tablets. The third drawn shall be the day.

[Each Prince writes upon a tablet.]

MERES *[To slave]*: Bring hither the vase to hold the tablets.

SLAVE: I hear and obey.

[He brings a golden vase.]

HAMAN: Are all the tablets inscribed?

PRINCES *[Writing]*: Aye, aye.

[Slave holds vase. The tablets are deposited.]

HAMAN: Now, the lot.

[He draws one, two and three. He lays aside one and two and hands number three to an officer.]

HAMAN: Read ye the writing.

OFFICER *[Reading]*: The fifth day of Nisan.

ALL: Nisan, the fifth day.

HAMAN: The fifth day of Nisan shall it be?

CARSHENA: Stay, Prince Haman. That is the Jewish Passover, a day propitious for the Jews

MERES: Draw again. Three draws are permitted.

ALL: Draw again.

HAMAN: I will draw again. Leave the tablets, and write ye other tablets also.

[They write and place tablets in the vase.]

ADMATHA: Let it be the second draw, Prince Haman.

HAMAN: So be it, the second draw.

[He draws, and hands the second tablet to the officer.]

HAMAN: Read.

OFFICER: The seventh day of Iyyar.

ALL: Iyyar, on the seventh day.

HAMAN: The seventh day of Iyyar be it; unless Prince Carshena, that day too favors the accursed race.

CARSHENA: 'Tis an evil day also, Prince Haman. It is the day of the Jews' Little Passover.

ALL: An evil day. Draw again. Another draw; another draw.

HAMAN: Another and the last draw; and may the gods favor us. For whatsoever the day, the first drawn shall surely be the day.

[They write again, and put all tablets in the vessel, and in doing so—]

MEMUCAN: Oh, Ahura, aid us.

SIETHIAR: Oh, Zaothra, speed us.

TARSHISH: Oh, Ashtaroth, support us.

MERES: Oh, Ishtar, favor us.

CARSHENA: Oh, Bel, guide us.

ADMATHA: Oh, Nabon, be with us.

MARSENA: Oh, Tistrya, set the day.

HAMAN: O most mighty Auramazda, be with us.

[He draws and holds the tablet aloft.]

ALL: Read, Prince Haman. Read; read. The pur, the pur, read, read the day.

HAMAN *[Reading]*: The thirteenth day of Adar is the day.

ALL: Adar, on the thirteenth day.

CARSHENA: My day. It is a good day.

ALL: Praised be the gods.

HAMAN: Aye, the gods have heard us. The gods are with us. It is a good day. It cometh under the sign Pisces. So be it. Now I shall be able to swallow them up as fish swallow one another.

[Trumpets are heard.]

HAMAN: Leave it to me. The King cometh.

[The KING enters in state. They all rise as the KING approaches, and do obeisance. The KING seats himself upon the throne.]

AHASUERUS: My Princes and Councillors, I greet you.

ALL: Hail, King of Kings, live forever.

AHASUERUS: The Council is called at the request of Prince Haman. We would not act, even at his request, without the advice of our Councillors and Princes. Speak now, Prince Haman, what is in thy mind, and be assured that whatever thou shalt present will receive due consideration by us and by the Council.

HAMAN: O King, live forever. Know then, O Majesty, there is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the King's laws; therefore it is not for the King's profit to suffer them. If it please the King, let it be written that they may be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring it into the King's treasuries.

AHASUERUS: I have, O Haman, heard ere now of this people, and how they cause dissension in the midst of my people, and their failure and refusal to obey my decree. What say the Council?

COUNCIL: O King, live forever. The King speaketh sooth. Prince Haman is right. Let it be as he says, if it pleaseth the King.

AHASUERUS: It shall be as Haman desires and as the Council advises. [*To HAMAN*]: Take this, our royal ring, as an emblem and assurance of our authority confided to thee. Further, the silver is given to thee, the people also to do with them as it seemeth good to thee. Bid enter the scribes, and further the business. Meanwhile, the Council is dissolved.

[The Council stand, salaam, and exit. Leaving the KING and HAMAN.]

[Enter the scribes and take seats.]

AHASUERUS: Proceed, O Haman.

HAMAN: Ibbi and scribes, attention. Write according to the decree of Ahasuerus, the King.

IBBI [*Bowing*]: Harkening and obedience, Lord Haman.

HAMAN: This thirteenth day of the first month. Unto the King's lieutenants, and to the Governors that are over every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language, the King commandeth and it is the law. Destroy, kill and cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and take the spoil of them for a prey. Let it be written, and it shall be sealed with the King's seal, which I hold.

See that the letters be sent by post into all the King's provinces, a copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province and published unto all people, that they be ready against that day. It is the law. For thus saith the King.

SCENE 2.—*House of Women.*

Esther. Miriam, Maids, Hatach. Maids grouped about the Queen at embroidery, arranging flowers and conversing. Distant wailing and cries of distress are heard.

ESTHER: Meseemeth some unusual excitement prevails in the City, and a stir abroad among the people. Sounds of distress have reached mine ears. What meaneth it, good Hatach?

HATACH: It hath been announced, O Queen, that at the request of Haman, the King hath decreed a slaughter of the Jews throughout his dominions, to take place on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, and the notice hath gone abroad by couriers to the farthest confines of the kingdom. Heralds have proclaimed the decree in the City and in Shushan the Palace. There is already great mourning among the Jews, and fasting and weeping, and many lie in sackcloth and ashes and cry aloud unto their God.

FATME: O Queen, there is a Jew, Mordecai by name, who hath rent his clothes and put on sackcloth with ashes and goeth about in the midst of the City crying with a loud and bitter cry.

TELIDA: I saw him ere now, even before the King's Gate.

MIRIAM: O Esther, my Queen, my——

ESTHER: Hush!

ESTHER [*Showing great perturbation*]: Go thou, good Hatach, to the King's Gate. Peradventure this Mordecai of whom the maids speak, is still there. Take him raiment for to clothe himself, and take way his sackcloth from him. Ask him the meaning of this mourning and lamentation, and why he lieth at the King's Gate in sackcloth.

HATACH: O Queen, I hear and obey.

[*Exit HATACH.*]

ESTHER: This is a dreadful thing I hear in regard to the Jews.

MIRIAM: Be comforted, all will yet be well:

FATME: It hath caused a great stir in the City, and even in the Palace. The people are perplexed, and the Jews stand in fear and trembling.

ROXANA: Prince Haman hath sworn to carry out the King's decree to the uttermost.

ESTHER: Ah, me, I am in deep distress. I fear me the King, who is naturally of a kind and gentle disposition, hath been over-persuaded by Haman.

FATME: He fears the Jews. This same Mordecai to whom thou hast dispatched Hatach, made a scene before the King's Gate in refusing to do obeisance to Haman, and Prince Haman is incensed beyond measure.

ESTHER: Would that something might be done to appease his wrath and to turn the King's heart.

TELIS: The couriers have been dispatched. The only hope is in time. The massacre is set for the thirteenth day of Adar, which is months hence.

ESTHER: Hatach will return anon. Meanwhile, pursue your work. Come, Fatme, Telis, and let me see how thou art progressing with thy tapestry. I desire that it be completed in time for display on the feast of Ishtar, which is what I have undertaken with the King.

[*The maids show tapestry.*]

ESTHER: Right well is the picture growing under thy deft fingers. The King and his retainers appear true to life. The colors are well conceived and placed. The expression on the King's face as he engages in his favorite pastime, is full of

animation. The flight of the falcons against the azure, in pursuit of the heron, is true to nature; mark how the quarry droops in fear as the birds of prey swoop down. [*Aside*]: Ah, me, the heron's case is mine, I do fear.

MIRIAM: No, no, dear sister. Remember our father's words.

[*Enter HATACH, bearing scroll.*]

ESTHER: Hatach returns. Draw near, my Hatach, and speak. What hast thou to report?

HATACH: O Queen, I came to Mordecai, who lay before the Gate as the maid hath said. He refuses thy gift and will not be comforted. He said that the decree for the killing of the Jews, his people, was made at the request of Haman, who promised to pay ten thousand talents to the King's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. He bade me deliver into thy hand this copy of the decree.

[*The QUEEN takes the scroll.*]

ESTHER: What further, my good Hatach, said he?

[*She looks at the scroll and shows signs of great perturbation, which she strives to suppress, as HATACH proceeds.*]

HATACH: O Queen, he further bade me charge thee,—forgive thy servant, I use his words,—that thou shouldst go in unto the King to make supplication unto him, and to make request before the King that he spare the Jews.

[*ESTHER reads the scroll, showing distress.*]

MIRIAM: Be comforted, my Queen. Remember and be brave.

ESTHER: Go thou, O Hatach, again unto this Mordecai, and say, thus saith the Queen Esther, who hath received thy word and the copy of the King's decree. All the King's servants and the people of the King's provinces do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the King into the Inner Court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the King shall hold out the golden sceptre that he may live, but I have not been called to come in unto the King these thirty days.

HATACH: O Queen, I hear and obey.

[*Exit HATACH.*]

ESTHER: Ah me, that I should be in such a strait. If I appear before the King and it pleaseth him not and he holdeth not out to me the golden sceptre, I am lost, and both I and my people shall die.

MIRIAM: He loveth thee, my Queen.

RENE: Risk not the King's displeasure, O Queen.

ZACHI: Do not, Oh, do not do this thing, and venture thy life for the unworthy Jews. Better were it that the Jews die than that one hair of thy head should be harmed.

ESTHER: I cannot do this thing. Oh, I cannot. Why doth Mordecai expect it of me? I love the King. He is kind and gentle. But he would spare me not if he were roused to wrath at my temerity. What shall I do? What shall I do?

FATME: Be comforted, O Queen. The Jews are to thee as less than naught.

ESTHER: Thou little knowest. O were it so indeed. But alas! My father, O my father! My people, O my people! My God, O my God! Release me from this too great trial and tribulation, for it is greater than I can bear.

[*Enter HATACH.*]

ESTHER: Approach, O Hatach, my faithful servant. What now?

HATACH: O Queen. Thy message hath been given to Mordecai, the Jew, at the gate, according as thou hast said.

ESTHER: What said he?

HATACH: O Queen. Thus spake Mordecai, the Jew that lieth without the gate: Say to the Queen Esther: Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the King's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed, and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

MIRIAM: Fear not, my Queen, the love of the King for thee is great.

ESTHER: Return thou, O Hatach, unto Mordecai and say unto him: Thus saith Esther, the Queen: Go, gather together all

the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the King, which is not according to the law, and if I perish, I perish!

ACT II.

SCENE 3—*House of Haman. Haman's seat vacant.*

Officers, Persians, Jews, standing grouped; including Mordecai and Joshua.

PERSIAN: Again hath the accursed Jew defied the authority of Prince Haman.

PERSIAN: We will no longer brook thy insolence.

RUSTAN: What meaneth this Mordecai in refusing to bow down before the Prince when he passeth in state?

PERSIAN: My lord, we know not.

PERSIAN [*Pointing to MORDECAI*]: See the Jew who refuseth to do obeisance to the mighty Prince.

JOSHUA: He is guilty of naught unlawful. Mordecai is not the slave of Haman that he should bow before him.

MORDECAI: Joshua, hold thy peace.

PERSIAN: The Jew is insolent—a malcontent. Let him be punished.

A JEW: He is innocent of wrong. Let him be.

A JEW: Long live Mordecai.

A JEW: Down with Haman.

MORDECAI: Peace, my friends, peace.

PERSIANS: Away with him. Away with the Jews, the slavish dogs. They despise our gods. He defies our Prince. Our noble, generous Prince. Away with the Jew. Out upon them all.

JEWS: Haman compasseth our destruction.

MORDECAI: Peace, I say, be still.

PERSIANS: We honor him therefor. The day cometh—the day of their destruction.

RUSTAN: Enough. I will speak with him.

JEWS: Beware the day, O Persians. Our God will succor us.

MORDECAI: Our God is our refuge and our strength.

PERSIAN: Hear them. Hear him. Their God, indeed, who hath deserted them and delivered them into our hands. Ye may call upon your God but He will not hear.

MORDECAI: Our God hath chastened us for our iniquities. But He will look again upon His chosen people who turn to Him in the day of their tribulation. A broken and a contrite heart He will not despise.

PERSIAN: Thy God sleepeth.

ANOTHER: He is deaf.

ANOTHER: He is on a journey.

ANOTHER: He is dead.

ANOTHER: The gods of Persia are greater than thy God.

RUSTAN [*To MORDECAI*]: Know ye not, O Mordecai, that King Ahasuerus——

PERSIANS [*bow and cry*]: "The great King of Kings."

RUSTAN: Know ye not, I say, that the King hath promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, and advanced him and set his seat above all the Princes that are with him, and hath commanded that all men bow before him and do him reverence? Wherefore, then, transgresseth thou the King's commandment?

MORDECAI: I am not careful to answer thee, O Rustan, in this matter. Trouble me not, but let me go.

RUSTAN: Answer me.

PERSIANS: Answer the noble Lord; answer, answer.

MORDECAI: So be it. Hear me. I remember me of Prince Daniel of my race, who stood before the King Darius aforetime, and regarded not the King that no man should ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, save of the King, on pain of being forthright cast into a den of lions; how Daniel kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God as he did aforetime, and was by order of the King cast into the den of lions; and how God delivered him from the mouths of the lions. Know ye then, the God of Daniel is my God and the

God of the captivity of Judah; to Him I bow and to Him only.
I neither regard nor fear this Haman.

PERSIANS: He speaketh of Daniel, the great Beltheshazzer.

PERSIAN: Aye, of Beltheshazzer.

JOSHUA: Aye, Daniel, our Prince and prophet of the Lord,
who died full of years and honored of the great King in Ecbatana
of Media.

JEW: The prophet Daniel.

JEW: When Zoroaster was Governor.

JEW: And none honored him as did your Zoroaster.

PERSIAN: He thinks he is another Daniel.

PERSIAN: A Daniel come to judgment.

JOSHUA: Aye, another Daniel. May God be with him!

RUSTAN: Get thee hence and make no more disturbance and
dissension among the people. Thy case shall be reported to the
noble Prince.

PERSIANS [*Pushing and jostling MORDECAI, JOSHUA and JEWS*]:
Out upon thee; out upon the Jews. Thou shalt suffer for this.
[*They jostle as MORDECAI, JOSHUA and JEWS move away.*] Cries
of "Death to Mordecai! Death to the Jews! Long live Mordecai!
Down with Haman! Get thee hence! Begone!"

MORDECAI [*Passing*] The God of Hosts is with us. The God
of Jacob is our refuge.

[*Exit MORDECAI, Jews, Persians, JOSHUA and RUSTAN.*]

PERSIAN: There he stood with clouded brow and unbent knee
as the Prince passed by.

PERSIAN: I saw him stand and glower and refuse Prince
Haman the respect which is his due.

PERSIAN: And others with him.

PERSIAN: Aye, he hath a following.

RICCA: Silence, Prince Haman approaches.

[*Enter HAMAN and ZERESH and attendants. People bow, and
HAMAN and ZERESH are seated. HAMAN looks disturbed,
and frowning.*]

HAMAN: Again, even as I entered, did that accursed Jew flout

me to my very face in the sight of all the people. With all my honors and dignities that the King hath bestowed upon me, as long as this Jew thwarts me at every turn, my honey is turned to gall and wormwood.

ZERESH: My Lord should arrest the Jew and have him cast into a dungeon until he undertake to conduct himself in a seemly way and in a manner to fittingly recognize my Lord's power and dignity.

RICA: Tolerate his insolence no longer my Lord. Have him seized and cast into prison.

[Enter RUSTAN, the Chief Officer. He salaams and stands at attention.

HAMAN: Well, Rustan, what of the Jews? Have the people dispersed in peace? What didst thou find? What said the Jews? Speak.

RUSTAN: My Lord, the Jew, Mordecai, is stiff-necked and insolent. He hath many supporters among his race and kindred, who, although they did thee perfunctory obeisance, immediately thou hadst passed, broke out in loud murmuring against thee.

HAMAN: And what of the Jew; speak.

RUSTAN: He again defied thy authority, and boasted that he acknowledged no superior but his God, to whom alone he bowed the knee. Even as but now in this house he likened himself unto Prince Daniel, and openly boasted that the God of Daniel, who saved him alive out of the den of lions, would protect him also, and would save his race from destruction and set at naught the decree of the King, granted at thy request, as he says.

HAMAN: Didst seize him as a disturber of the peace and stirrer up of a sedition among the people?

RUSTAN: Not so, my Lord; such were not my Lord's orders.

HAMAN: Know Rustan, there are times when a faithful officer should exercise a certain discretion. However, I blame thee not. See that Mordecai is watched by trusty officers and report to me where he goeth and whatsoever he doeth; his outgoings and his incomings; and what effect he hath upon the people. And now, go.

RUSTAN: Harkening and obedient, my Lord.

[*Exit RUSTAN.*]

HAMAN: Here am I, with riches and honors surpassing those of any subject or Prince in the kingdom; second only to the King himself in power and authority; being advanced above all the Princes and servants of the King. My children, even my ten sons, their wives and children, all do honor and obedience to me and do my will in all things. The Princes and the people, both in the palace and without the gate, seek every occasion to show obedience to my will; and this Jew only refuses to do obeisance to me. Only last night, at the request of the Queen, I attended a banquet with the King and Queen. Yea, Esther, the Queen, did let no man come in with the King unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and tomorrow am I invited unto her also with the King. Yet all this availeth me nothing so long as I see Mordecai sitting at the King's gate.

PHARAN: It is a grievance hardly to be borne. Cast him into prison.

NADIR: His days are numbered, as also are the days of all the Jews. Let him bide the time in prison.

ZERESH: My Lord, why wait? 'Twere better to anticipate the decree and let him die. Listen to me, my Lord, and hearken to my words. Let now a gallows be made fifty cubits high, and tomorrow speak thou unto the King that Mordecai may be hanged thereon; then go thou merrily with the King unto the banquet.

ALL: Aye, so let it be. Let the Jew be hanged and so rid thyself of his hated presence forever.

NADIR: I favor death by the bow. It is quieter and more expeditious.

ZERESH: Nay, not so. Hanging is the only way to prevail over thine enemies. The Jews have always been rescued from every other kind of death.

HAMAN: Only by so doing can one obtain peace and ease of mind. By Ashtar, it shall be done, even as Zeresh hath said. The fellow shall surely die, and that without delay.—Nadir!

NADIR [*Bowing*]: My Lord!

HAMAN: See ye to it. A gallows of fifty cubits; in the court-

yard. Bid ye the artificers in wood forthwith construct the gallows. Delay not. Within two days let it be finished, and bring me word.

NADIR: Hearkening and obedience.

[*Exit NADIR.*]

HAMAN: Pharin.

PHARIN: My Lord.

HAMAN: Summon Rustan if he be still within the precincts.

PHARIN: I hear and obey.

[*Exit PHARIN.*]

ZERESH: O wisely hast thou decided to end thy troubles, to pluck this thorn from thy side.

HAMAN: Aye, it is time to act, and by the death of Mordecai, gain peace and security.

[*Enter RUSTAN.*]

HAMAN: Rustan, hast directed thy men to watch Mordecai, the Jew?

RUSTAN: Aye, my Lord.

HAMAN: Hearken thou to my words. Take further steps to keep strict watch upon the movements of the Jew, so that he may be seized at any moment. Have a watch kept both day and night; and when my messenger bringeth thee this ring [*showing a ring*], mark it well; seize Mordecai and convey him to the vault beneath the court. The gallows thou shalt see in the inner court is intended for him. Hang him straightway thereon. Do all things with secrecy and speed; then send me word wherever I may be. This do and fail not. On thy head be it.

RUSTAN: Hearkening and obedience.

[*Exit RUSTAN.*]

ACT III.

SCENE 1.—*Night.*

King's Chamber. King in bed. He is restless. The Chamberlain is watching.

AHASUERUS: Unpleasant dreams have haunted me. Sleep hath forsaken me and mine eyelids refuse to slumber.

[He sits up and calls loudly.]

What ho! Chamberlain, Zethar, come hither.

[ZETHAR approaches and stands in attitude of obeisance.]

AHASUERUS: I have lain on my couch and have sought repose in sleep, which usually cometh unbidden with the night; but the fickle jade will not be wooed. As she refuseth to come at my bidding, I will turn the night to day as more fitting my wakeful mood. Make lights and summon immediately Nargum the Chief Chronicler to my presence.

ZETHAR: Harkening and obedience.

[Lights are brought and the KING is assisted into a comfortable lounging position.]

AHASUERUS: Stay. What of the night?

ZETHAR: It lacketh three hours of the dawn.

AHASUERUS: First, then, summon hither the Chaldean astrologers and the soothsayers, and let the Chief Chronicler wait.

ZETHAR: Harkening and obedience.

[Exit ZETHAR.]

[Enter MELCHOIR, BELZAC and ZAROSTER, the three astrologers.]

AHASUERUS: Approach, Melchoir, with your fellows.

[They draw near and stand bowed.]

AHASUERUS: Harken to my words and give heed thereto. I cannot sleep. My mind is disturbed with vague forebodings. What is the prospect of the heavens, and what do the stars denote? Speak, O Melchoir.

MELCHOIR [*Chief Astrologer*]: O King, live forever. Thy servants have spent the watches of the night in the study of the heavenly bodies. Know, O King, the morning star hath rule in the Chamber of Death. The Lord of the Third House is combust and retrograde with the Eleventh, presaging evil. The day is pregnant with calamity. The Lord of the Fourth House is in conjunction with the Lord of the Ascendant. Within his leaden sphere Hylech is cadent. There is a malevolent aspect, menacing ill to the Queen. But it will not prevail. There are other strong and countervailing signs. The rest is hidden from me as by a thick cloud.

AHASUERUS: And thou, O Belzac, what sayest thou?

BELZAC: O King, live forever. But last night, as I watched in the tower, behold the heavens were ablaze with stars; and the crescent moon sailed on her course. Majestic and serene she traversed the sky. Malignant and cross aspects darted their baleful rays athwart the tract. In vain they scowled. She pursued her course in splendor undisturbed. When, behold, on a sudden a star of great brilliance from out the blackness and obscurity, suddenly flashed athwart the sky and followed the course of the moon, its effulgence undiminished. And, behold, as I gazed, another bright particular star fell from the sky, even from the zenith to the horizon, and was seen no more.

AHASUERUS: What, O Belzac, doth this marvel of the heavens portend?

BELZAC: O King, live forever. The moon is the Queen of the Heavens, the glorious spouse of the sun, the King thereof; even as thou, O Majesty, art King of the World; and reflects the glory and the majesty thereof, even as the beauteous Queen Esther, in attendance on thy Majesty, shines with splendor in the light of thy august presence.

AHASUERUS [*Looking flattered and pleased*]: Aye, and the stars. What is their significance, and what do they denote?

MELCHOIR: The second star, O Majesty, the favored of the Lord of the Heavens, is none other than a servant of the King, who hath incurred thy royal displeasure, and is cast from his high place forever; and as he falls, another (which is the first star), by the favor of thy Majesty and at the request of the

Queen is exalted in his place, and even to higher honor and glory in the presence of the King.

AHASUERUS: So far, so well. And the moon, thou sayest, shone on with renewed splendor. That, O Astrologer, needs no explanation. It is a happy augury for our Queen; and as the moon's brilliance dependeth on the sun, it is an equally happy augury for ourselves.

MELCHOIR: O Fountain of Light and Wisdom, thou sayest sooth. From thee nothing is hidden and unto thee all things are revealed.

AHASUERUS: But the stars, the stars. It is now apparent why sleep forsook mine eyes. Praised be Auramazda, my royal estate is secure; but woe to him whose star hath descended. He shall be utterly cast out, and another shall fill his place before me.

MELCHOIR: Even so, O King of Kings. It shall be as thou sayest.

AHASUERUS: And thou, Zaroster, what sayest thou?

ZAROSTER: O Mighty King, the glory of the sun is thy glory; and the glory of the moon is the Queen's glory; and the glory of the stars is the glory of thy Princes. One star differeth from another star in glory even according to the order in which they stand in the light of thy countenance.

AHASUERUS: O Melchoir, Belzac and Zaroster, Astrologers and Soothsayers, what say ye? Have we now the full and true prognostication of events according to the heavenly bodies ruling the universe?

MELCHOIR: O King, live forever. The portents and their prognosis are truly shown to and declared by thy majesty. [*BELZAC and ZAROSTER make signs of assent*]: Aye, aye.

AHASUERUS: 'Tis well. Chamberlain, is the Grand Chronicler without?

ZETHAR: He is, O King.

AHASUERUS: Melchoir and ye Astrologers and Soothsayers of Chaldea, true servants of the King and of Ahura and Tistrya; depart hence. Ye have our thanks. We commend your learning and your loyalty. Reveal to none what hath been disclosed. When the sun in his course hath risen forty and seven degrees

above the horizon, go ye to the royal Treasurer and ye shall be duly rewarded, and this (taking a ring from his finger and handing it to the Chief Astrologer), shall be your warrant for the favor that shall be bestowed upon you. Go!

ALL [*Bowing low*]: Harkening and obedience, O King!

[*Salaam and exit.*]

AHASUERUS: Now, the Chronicles.

[*Enter the Chief Chronicler, with attendants bearing the Tablets of the Chronicles.*]

AHASUERUS: Nargum.

NARGUM: My lord.

AHASUERUS: Nargum, read ye the last three chapters of the Chronicles.

NARGUM: Harkening and obedience, O King.

[*He reads from the tablets, which are handed to him one at a time.*]

"And it came to pass on a day in the fifth month of the third year of the reign of Ahasuerus, the King, after that for good cause he had divorced from him Vashti, his Queen, and when the King had chosen Esther to be Queen in her place and stead, that Bigthan and Teresh, two of the King's Chamberlains, the keepers of the inner doors of the Palace, sought to lay hands on the King out of revenge for the dethronement of Vashti. And behold, one Mordecai, a Jew, hearing of the plot of the Chamberlains, straightway apprised the King thereof, through his officers, and Bigthan and Teresh were hanged."

AHASUERUS: Stop, and answer me truly. What honor and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this?

ZETHAR: O King, live forever. There is nothing done for him, O King.

AHASUERUS: Who is in the court?

ZETHAR: Behold, O King, Prince Haman standeth in the court.

AHASUERUS: It is well. Let him come in.

[*Exit servant. Enter HAMAN.*]

AHASUERUS: My Lord, Haman.

HAMAN: Speak, O King; thy servant heareth.

AHASUERUS: What shall be done unto the man whom the King delighteth to honor?

HAMAN [*Thinking in his heart that he is the man*]: O King, live forever. Whom the King delighteth to honor, let the royal apparel be brought which the King useth to wear, and the horse that the King rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head, and let this apparel be brought and delivered to the hand of one of the King's most noble Princes, that they may array the man withal whom the King delighteth to honor, and bring him on horseback through the streets of the city, and proclaim before him, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the King delighteth to honor."

AHASUERUS: Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai, the Jew, that sitteth at the King's gate; let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken.

HAMAN [*Showing chagrin*]: O King, I hear and obey.

AHASUERUS [*Sotto voce*]: The stars, the stars, Ahura and Tistrya. I see thy hand in this, even as the Astrologers have foretold.

SCENE 2—*Banquet.*

King. Queen. Haman. In course of drinking. Manasseh, Captain of the Guard, in attendance. Chief Butler. Chief Baker. Attendants. Slaves. They are served.

AHASUERUS [*In friendly tones, but with half-veiled sarcasm*]: Well, my worthy Grand Vizier, didst fully carry out my commands in respect to Mordecai, the man whom the King delighteth to honor?

HAMAN [*With partially concealed chagrin and mortification*]: O King, thy commands were fulfilled.

AHASUERUS: A wise counsellor, my Haman. The royal apparel?

HAMAN: Aye, the royal apparel, O King.

AHASUERUS: 'Tis well.—And the horse the King rideth upon?

HAMAN: Aye, the King's horse also.

AHASUERUS: Good! And the crown royal?

HAMAN: Aye, O King, even the crown royal.

AHASUERUS: And Mordecai was duly arrayed, and placed upon the horse, and thou broughtest him through the streets of the city and proclaimed before him, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the King delighteth to honor"?

HAMAN [*Who cannot suppress his feelings of humiliation and chagrin*]: All, all was done, O King, even as thou commanded.

AHASUERUS: And even as thou advised?

HAMAN: Even so, O King.

AHASUERUS: 'Tis well, Prince Haman. 'Tis well, my faithful counsellor, whose wisdom is great and more precious than rubies. But enough of Mordecai. My good Haman, it is thee the King delighteth to honor on this occasion; and the Queen also would do thee honor; for, as thou knowest, it was at the special request of the Queen that thou wert bidden to the feast. Was't not so, my beloved?

ESTHER: Aye, truly, my dear Lord; and as I approached thee as thou satest enthroned in the Inner Court, to proffer my request, well knowing that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the King into the Inner Court who is not called, there is one law of thine to put him to death——

AHASUERUS: Except such to whom the King shall hold out the golden sceptre.

ESTHER: Which thou didst do, and greeted me with thy love.

AHASUERUS: Aye, and gave my royal word that thy request was granted unheard, and that it should be given thee, even to the half of my kingdom it should be performed. And hear, O Haman, the request which the Queen made; said the Queen, "Then let the King and Haman come to the banquet which I shall prepare for them, and I will do tomorrow as the King hath said." Was it not so, my Queen?

ESTHER: It is just as thou hast stated, my Lord.

HAMAN: Great King and fairest Queen, thy devoted servant is

overwhelmed at thy condescension, and thanks thee for this honor far surpassing his poor deserts.

AHASUERUS: Nay, nay, be assured of our love and confidence to theeward. And thou art chosen to witness how the King shall fulfill his promise to the Queen. Aye, even to the half of my kingdom shall it be fulfilled.

HAMAN: My Lord and King, and my fair and gracious Queen; thy servant is ever most dutiful and grateful.

AHASUERUS: Well, my Haman, meseems ourselves and our country have fallen on happy times. Our armies have been successful on the frontiers of our ever enlarging dominions, and peace and prosperity are universal. With our Queen and thee, my trusted counsellor and friend, we have every cause for joy and gladness. Happy am I that the Queen joins me in showing thee honor and consideration.

HAMAN: O King, thy humble servant rejoices to enjoy thy favor and that of the Queen, and will continue to serve thee in all good faith, to thy honor and glory which shines over all the world. [ESTHER *looks askance at HAMAN.*] Permit thy servant in all humility to thank the Queen for this so signal a mark of her royal favor.

ESTHER: That, O Haman, is as the event may show.

AHASUERUS [To *Usbek the Butler*]: Fill ye, O Usbek, fill ye the cups with our choicest wine of the valley of the Euphrates and I will pledge the Queen.

[USBEK, *the Butler, fills the cups.*]

AHASUERUS: All happiness and peace to thee, our Queen, the chosen of my heart among all the daughters of my realm. Compared to this, my present happy state, my former days were a wilderness, a sandy desert. Thou hast made the desert of my heart to blossom as the rose and to laugh with joy and gladness as the palms and springs of water in a thirsty place.

[*They drink, HAMAN bowing low.*]

HAMAN: To Queen Esther, the light of the King's eyes and the delight and love of all the Princes and the people.

AHASUERUS [*Pleased and smiling, to the Chief Butler*]: O

Usbek, fill ye again and to the brim, the cups with the wine of Helbon, for there is none better.

[Wine is poured by USBEK.]

AHASUERUS: And now a pledge in which I invite the Queen to join. To our Grand Vizier, in whom reposes our utmost love and confidence; by whose administration, in wisdom and strength, our burdens of state are light and our people are happy and content. Long life and happiness may he enjoy in the light of our countenance.

[He raises the cup and looks at HAMAN; then at the QUEEN. The QUEEN flushes and hesitates. The KING notes with growing amazement.]

AHASUERUS: What is this I see, Queen Esther? Art thou ill, my beloved?

ESTHER *[Rising without touching the cup]*: Stay, O King, and hear my words, and judge ye then of me and him. Hear, O King, my petition as thou promised me when in the Inner Court thou heldest out to me the Golden Sceptre.

[HAMAN shows signs of fear and tries to speak but is inarticulate. The KING shows great astonishment and rising anger.]

AHASUERUS: I remember well. What is thy petition, my Queen Esther, and it shall be granted thee. And what is thy request, and it shall be performed, even to the half of the kingdom.

ESTHER: If I have found favor in thy sight, O King, and if it please the King, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request; for we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the King's damage.

AHASUERUS: Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?

ESTHER: The adversary and the enemy is this wicked Haman.

[The KING shows great consternation. HAMAN shows fear, and strives to speak but is inarticulate.]

AHASUERUS: What is this I hear at the mouth of the Queen? Haman plotting against the Queen?

[HAMAN *half rises and attempts to speak.*]

AHASUERUS: Haman, be still. The man I love, the man I have honored above all the Princes, a traitor? Have I nourished a viper in my bosom, that he should turn and sting me to the heart? O woe! O woe!

[*He rises unsteadily, and, distraught, goes into the garden.*]

HAMAN [*Half rising*]: Queen Esther, what hath thy servant done that he should suffer thus at thy hands?

ESTHER: Approach me not, but hear me [*He sinks back.*] Thou knowest I am of the Jewish race and it was not holden from thee that Mordecai is my foster-father, although it was withheld from the King. Yet, in thy hatred of the Jews, in the arrogance of thine heart, thou persuadest the King to kill my people. And even now, thou seekest the life of Mordecai to destroy it. Thinkest thou I would remain silent?

HAMAN: O Queen, I knew it not. The Jews were a menace, and Mordecai obeyed not the law. For that only did I obtain the decree from the King. I seek not to destroy Mordecai. Did I not give him royal honors for saving the King's life?

ESTHER: Out upon thee, liar and traitor! Thou deserveth the fate of Bigthan and Teresh, with whom, I am advised, thou wert allied to encompass the death of the King also.

HAMAN: 'Tis false! 'Tis false! By all the gods, I swear it.

ESTHER: Swear not before me. Remember I am your Queen.

HAMAN: Forgive me, O Queen. I pray thee intercede for me with the King. As for Mordecai, I will reverse my orders for his death, but as for the King's decree in regard to the Jews, alas, his word is passed; it is the law; it cannot be altered.

ESTHER: False perjurer, out of thine own mouth thou art convicted and condemned. Almost in one breath thou sayest, "As to Mordecai, I knew it not," and again, "I will reverse my orders for his death." Even now, I hear the noise of the saws and hammers of the carpenters engaged in the erection of a gallows designed by thee for Mordecai.

[*The KING is seen re-entering slowly; he stands aghast at what he sees.*]

HAMAN [*Desperate, rising, staggers toward the QUEEN, drawing a dagger*]: Enough, false, hard-hearted woman; offspring of the dregs of the slaves; vile upstart. My life is forfeit because of thee; but thou, too, shalt die.

[*He attacks the QUEEN. They both fall on the QUEEN'S couch.*]

MANASSEH [*Rushing forward and struggling with HAMAN*]: Assassin, stay thy hand.

[*The KING appears.*]

[*In the struggle MANASSEH wrests the dagger from HAMAN, stabs him and throws him down.*]

AHASUERUS: Hold him fast. What then is this that I see? Will he force the Queen also before me in the house?

[*HAMAN is still; dead.*]

MANASSEH: The traitor is dead, O King.

AHASUERUS: Cover his face from my sight.

[*They cover HAMAN with a cloth snatched from the table.*]

HARBONAH: O King, live forever. Behold also the gallows fifty cubits high which Haman had made for Mordecai, who had spoken good for the King, standeth in the house of Haman.

AHASUEURS: Ah! The gallows! Hang him thereon. And so, the star of Haman has set forever; and behold another shall rise in his place and stead, as was foretold by the Astrologers. But the Sun and the Moon shine on, shine on.

SCENE 3—Corridor of King's Council Chamber.

Ahasuerus, Esther and Manasseh.

AHASUERUS: My Queen, I have rid myself of your enemy, and the enemy of your race. Art content, beloved?

ESTHER: My King! My husband! Your wife is deeply grateful to your Majesty for his act of justice. I and my people (for indeed I am a Jewess born) will ever bless thee. The Jews are filled with joy and praise thy name, and extol thy majesty and glory by day and night, in their homes and in the streets.

AHASUERUS: I knew not thou wert of the Jewish race. Now am I doubly glad for what I have done, for that it pleaseth thee, my beloved. I would do even greater things than I have accomplished in the death of the unspeakable Haman. Moreover, I bethink me that Mordecai, who saved my life, is also a Jew; and to him I owe a debt of gratitude it were hard even for a King to fully requite. For him and for thee my heart inclineth toward thy race.

ESTHER: I would have thee know that Mordecai, of whom thou speakest, stands in the stead of a father to me. My father died when I was yet a child, and Mordecai, who is a nephew of my father, albeit there are so many years between us, and indeed the disparity in years made the thing seemly and wise, adopted me as his daughter, and in his household and under his guidance and care I grew to womanhood, leaving the shelter of his home only to enter the House of the King's Women, according to the King's decree, where I at length found favor in thy sight, my gracious Lord.

AHASUERUS: What thou sayest is still further reason that I should show favor to Mordecai. I will have him in. In the meantime on thee, dear Queen, I bestow the house of Haman, the Jew's enemy, that all people may know that I look no longer with disfavor upon the Jews. [*To ABAGTHA.*] Is Mordecai without?

ABAGTHA: O King, Mordecai is in attendance.

AHASUERUS: Bid him enter.

[*Exit ABAGTHA.*]

AHASUERUS: And thou, Manasseh, we owe thee our gratitude, and even though it be said there is nothing so uncertain as the gratitude of kings, we will that thou shouldst be assured of our royal favor. Thou, too, art a Jew?

MANASSEH: It is as thou sayest, O King.

ESTHER: My cousin, a nephew of Mordecai.

[*Enter ABAGTHA followed by MORDECAI, who does obeisance.*]

AHASUERUS: Approach, Mordecai, we desire thy presence. Now Manasseh, what is thy wish? Speak freely and it shall be granted thee for that thou savedst the Queen from the foul attempt of the wicked Haman.

MANASSEH [*Hesitating*]: O King, live forever. There is a maid, a daughter of Mordecai, I would beg permission of the King to take her to wife, if it pleaseth the King.

AHASUERUS: Truly a modest boon; what is her name?

MANASSEH: Her name, O King, is Miriam.

AHASUERUS: The same Miriam whom we have seen in attendance on the Queen?

ESTHER: The same, O King; my own dear cousin, who is now in attendance in the ante-chamber.

AHASUERUS: Bid the maid to our presence.

[*Exit ABAGTHA.*]

AHASUERUS: Manasseh; thou hast been faithful to our person and to the Queen; and, as the future husband of the Queen's cousin, the daughter of Mordecai, we will bestow upon thee a rank and dignity befitting such relationship. The office to be conferred on thee will take thee for a time at least from our presence and our capital; but the wife of thy choice will doubtless solace thee and render thy absence tolerable to thee. As Governor of Ecbatana of Media, O Manasseh, continue to serve thy King in honor and fealty.

MANASSEH: Thanks, great King; thy servant will obey and serve thee in all zeal and faith.

[*Enter MIRIAM. ESTHER takes her by the hand as she bows and stands before the KING.*]

AHASUERUS: This is Miriam, the daughter of Mordecai?

MORDECAI: My daughter, O Majesty.

ESTHER: My dear, dear cousin, O Ahasuerus.

AHASUERUS: Miriam, the Governor of Ecbatana hath asked thy hand in marriage. What sayest thou?

MIRIAM [*Astonished and alarmed*]: O King, I am in thy power; thou canst do with me as thou wilt; but the Governor of Ecbatana is unknown to me.

AHASUERUS: What; thy cousin, the Queen; thy father, Mordecai, and Manasseh, Captain of the Guard, all agree that such a marriage would be pleasing to them, and methinks it should be pleasing to thee also.

MIRIAM [*In perplexity and distress*]: The Queen; my father; Manasseh? O, Manasseh.

AHASUERUS: Yea, little one, even so; and I the King command it. Governor of Ecbatana.

MANASSEH [*Bowing low*]: My King.

[MIRIAM *looks surprised, and slowly shows that she understands.*]

AHASUERUS: We bestow on thee the hand of Miriam, the Queen's cousin, the daughter of Mordecai. [MANASSEH and MIRIAM *embrace.*] Take her, and if she be half as loving and dutiful as is Esther, the Queen, thou wilt have ample cause to bless the day and thank thy King.

[*They bow low.*]

AHASUERUS: Now, Mordecai, give heed. As thou hast heard, our Queen hath told us of her relation to thee, and how thou hast reared her as a daughter from her youth up. This is an added claim to our royal favor. Thou hast saved our life; and now we learn that our lovely Queen was nurtured by thee, and that under thy care she hath acquired the accomplishments and graces befitting her natural charms of person, making her in all things worthy the Queenship we have bestowed upon her.

MORDECAI: O King, live forever. Deign to receive my humble thanks for thy so great condescension both to the Queen and to me.

AHASUERUS: Good, my Mordecai. Take thou this ring, worn by Haman aforetime, the badge of honor, denoting the wearer to be Grand Vizier of my realm, and second only to the King himself in all our dominions. The place and honors of Haman are henceforth thine; and more also shall be given thee.

[MORDECAI *does obeisance.*]

ESTHER: And, if it please the King to set Mordecai over the house of Haman, which thou hast bestowed upon me, then shall the people know of a surety that the Jews stand in the light of thy countenance, having found favor in thine eyes and not dishonor.

AHASUERUS: It shall be as the Queen desires.

ESTHER: Mordecai, my father, by gracious permission of the King, as thou hast heard, I set thee over the house of Haman, bestowed upon me by the King. Thus will all people know that Mordecai is approved in the sight of King Ahasuerus.

MORDECAI: Most gracious King and Queen Esther. In receiving this added favor and honor, far beyond my merit,—

AHASUERUS: Ourselves will be the judge as to that, Mordecai.

MORDECAI: My people will know that King Ahasuerus is their friend and not their enemy. O King, methinks 'twere meet at this time to call to remembrance the decree of the King aforetime respecting the Jews, my people, and what the King hath decreed at the behest of the wicked Haman; how—

AHASUERUS: Hold, now, Mordecai. Remember thou, before all things, that no matter what thy services to the King, or thy relationship to the Queen, and the honors with which thou art clothed; there is a law which altereth not, that whosoever shall come unto the King into the Inner Court who is not called, he shall be put to death, except such to whom the King shall hold out the Golden Sceptre that he may live. Thou wert not called for this; and I would spare thee. Beware, venture no further lest evil befall thee for transgressing the law.

ESTHER [*Falling at the feet of the KING*]: My Lord! My King! Let me speak and live. I beseech thee, put away entirely the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his device that he hath devised against the Jews to put them to death. I pray thee, hear me.

AHASUERUS [*Holding out the golden sceptre*]: Speak, my Queen, and live.

ESTHER [*Rising and standing before the KING*]: If it pleaseth the King, and if I have found favor in his sight, and the thing seem right before the King, and I be pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews which are in all the King's provinces, for how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? Or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?

AHASUERUS: My Queen, thou knowest not what thou sayest. Reverse my decree? Impossible! It is a law; a law of the

Medes and Persians, which altereth not. The decree must stand. What can be done, however, shall be done.

ESTHER: Alas, alas, my people! My kindred! Shall they then perish at the hand and at the decree of my husband?

AHASUERUS: Not so. The old decree must stand. It cannot be reversed, but there shall be a new decree.

ESTHER: A new decree; ah, a new decree!

MORDECAI: Great King, a new decree! Oh, wise, illustrious King.

AHASUERUS: Behold, Queen Esther, and thou, Mordecai. I have given Esther the house of Haman, and him they have hanged upon the gallows because he laid his hand upon the Jews. Write ye also for the Jews as it liketh you in the King's name, and sealed with the King's ring; for the writing which is written in the King's name, and sealed with the King's ring, may no man reverse. And thus we leave the matter with thee, Mordecai, to further the business.

MORDECAI: O King, live forever! Thy servant hears and obeys.

MORDECAI: Bid enter the Chief of the Scribes.

[IBBI, the Chief Scribe, enters and bows.]

MORDECAI: Ibbi, Chief of the Scribes, write as the King commandeth. In the third month, the month Sivan, on the three and twentieth day thereof, King Ahasuerus, by Mordecai, his Grand Vizier, unto the Jews and to the Lieutenants and rulers of the provinces, which are from India unto Ethiopia, an hundred, twenty and seven provinces according to the writing thereof, and unto every people after their language, and to the Jews according to their writing, and according to their language; the King granteth to the Jews in every city to gather themselves together and to stand for their life, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and the province that would assault them, both little ones and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey, upon one day, in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, namely, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar. The copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province and published unto

all the people that the Jews be ready against that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. Write the writing, and it shall be sealed with the King's ring as a commandment of King Ahasuerus unto all people.

MORDECAI: See that letters be sent by post on horseback, and riders on mules, camels and young dromedaries, throughout all of the provinces of King Ahasuerus, even from India to Ethiopia; for so the King hath ordained.

MANASSEH: My Lord and King.

AHASUERUS: Speak Manasseh.

MANASSEH: If it please the King; thy servant craves permission to remain in Shushan until after the fifteenth Adar; so that he may remain and act as the Captain of the King's Guard until all possibility of disturbance and danger be passed.

AHASUERUS: 'Tis well, Manasseh; thy wish is granted. Thou wilt remain in Shushan until the thirtieth day of Adar; after which, all being well, thou wilt proceed to Ecbatana to take up thy duties as Governor. In the meantime, see thou to the organizing of the forces to stand by Mordecai and the Jews in support of the decree which thou hast heard.

MANASSEH: Thanks, great King. Thy servant hears and obeys.

ACT IV.

SCENE 1—*Court of the Garden of the King's Palace.*

(Time: 516 B. C. Twelfth Month.)

As curtain rises sounds of shouting and clash of arms behind the scenes.

Right—Mordecai, Joshua, Jews, Manasseh. Left—Parshandatha and Persians. All armed and standing ready for conflict.

VOICES: They come! They come!

" Stand fast.

" Jehovah is with us.

" At last!

" Smite them without mercy!

" Strike for Jehovah and the King.

" The King is with us.

" Mordecai is our leader.

" We cannot fail.

MORDECAI: Harken to me. Men of Judah, hear me. [*As he speaks, Persians led by PARSHANDATHA, son of HAMAN, shout and clash swords on shields.*] The day of retribution hath come. In spite of the decree of the King, the Persians and the Medes seek to carry out the orders procured by the wicked Haman for your destruction.

PERSIANS: Death to the Jews!

JEWS: Death and defiance to the enemies of Jehovah.

PARSHANDATHA: O Mordecai, we remember the first decree of the King, Ahasuerus, which no power could alter, that on this day the Jews throughout the kingdom should perish at our hands, and here, even in Shushan the Palace, that decree shall be carried out.

MORDECAI: O Parshandatha, son of Haman, ye know that all the loyal subjects of the King have no part in this thy evil design, and the King's heart is not with thee and thy followers.

PARSHANDATHA: The decree cannot be altered. We will carry out the decree. Thou shalt die and all thy accursed race.

PERSIANS: Yea, death to Mordecai. Death to the Jews.

MORDECAI: On thy head be it then. Men of Judah, remember the later decree of the King and stand for your lives. Resist, fight, kill and spare not they who seek to destroy you. Here in Shushan the Palace, come your enemies, the friends of Haman and led by his sons.

PARSHANDATHA: Remember Vashti! Remember Haman! Kill! Kill! Spare not! Take their goods for a prey. Kill, kill, death to the Jews!

MORDECAI: On your heads be it then, O Men of Persia. Now Jews, stand for your lives! Fall on, kill, and spare not; but take not of the spoil.

[They fight, many cut down on both sides but principally Persians. Persians are driven back, fighting, and off stage, followed by Jews.]

[MANASSEH engaged with PARSHANDATHA. Noise of fighting and shouting continues behind the scenes, and gradually diminishing, ceases.]

[Enter MORDECAI, JOSHUA (wounded) and Jews.]

JOSHUA: Master, the day is ours.

MORDECAI: 'Tis well.

[Enter MANASSEH.]

MANASSEH: Of our enemies many are slain, the rest have fled.

MORDECAI: Again hath Jehovah triumphed and set at naught his enemies.

MANASSEH: Aye, and the ten sons of Haman the Agagite have perished by the edge of the sword.

JOSHUA: Including Parshandatha, his eldest, slain at the hand of Manasseh. None are left of them that sought to destroy the chosen of the Lord.

MORDECAI: Not unto us but unto Thee, O Jehovah, be the honor and glory. We praise Thy name forever and ever.

MANASSEH: The King approaches.

MORDECAI: Stand by. Stand by.

[The people withdraw to sides of stage.]

[KING and QUEEN with MIRIAM enter with retinue.]

ALL [*Bowing low*]: All hail, great King of Kings.

AHASUERUS: Greeting, Mordecai and loyal people.

[KING and QUEEN enthroned, music and dancing.]

AHASUERUS: Peace is at length established; the Jews are avenged and Haman's ten sons are slain at the edge of the sword.

ESTHER: Hath my Lord granted my request which I made to the King, that the sons of the wicked Haman be hanged on the gallows?

AHASUERUS: Yea, my Queen. Behold the sons of Haman!

[*As the KING speaks officers throw open the curtains in rear and HAMAN's ten sons are seen hanging to ten gibbets in the back distance.*]

ESTHER: I thank thee. It is well. So perish all the enemies of God's chosen people. Now, indeed, hath retribution fallen upon mine enemies and the enemies of my race.

[*Cheers are heard within and without.*]

AHASUERUS: Yes, my Queen, all is now accomplished according to thy wishes. And now, Prince Mordecai, announce to my Princes and to the people and to the Jews, my further decree.

[*More cheers are heard from without.*]

AHASUERUS [*To officer*]: Yet stay. Bid enter my loyal subjects, to hear at the mouth of Mordecai, the Grand Vizier, what I have decreed concerning the Jews.

OFFICER: Harkening and obedience, Great King.

[*Officer salaams and exit.*]

[*Enter soldiers, Persians and Jews. They salaam and stand at sides and back.*]

AHASUERUS: Now, Prince Mordecai, proclaim my decree.

MORDECAI [*Bowing*]: I hear and obey.

Thus saith Ahasuerus, the King of Kings; and all who hear, take heed, for it is his will; and his will is the law of the Medes and Persians which altereth not. In lasting commemoration of

the triumph of the Jews over their enemies and the enemies of my throne; the Jews who are of the kinsmen of the Queen and of the race of Queen Esther and of Mordecai, the Grand Vizier,——

There shall be established among the Jews, that they keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same, yearly, forever, as the days wherein the Jews rested from their enemies, and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning into a good day; that they make of them days of feasting and joy,——

PEOPLE: Feasting and joy.

MORDECAI: And of sending portions one to another and gifts to the poor,——

PEOPLE: Gifts to the poor.

MORDECAI: And these days shall be called Purim,——

PEOPLE: Purim, Purim.

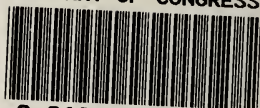
MORDECAI: After the name of Pur; that these days be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province and every city, and that these days of Purim shall not fail from among the Jews, nor the memorial of them perish from their seed. Thus saith the King.

ALL: May the King live forever, and the feast of Purim continue to the end of days. May the King live forever.

[*General ensemble; music and dancing.*]

[*Curtain to the strains of "Sound the Loud Timbrel."*]

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